

LIFE'S ANSWER.

BY THE LATE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

I know not if the dark or bright
Shall be my lot;
If that wherein my hopes delight,
Be best or not.
It may be mine to drag for years,
Toil's heavy chain;
Or day and night my meat be tears
Or bed of pain.

Dear faces may surround my hearth
With smiles and glee;
Or I may dwell alone, and mirth
Be strange to me.

My bark is wafted to the strand,
My breath divine;
And on the helm there rests a hand
Other than mine.

One who has known in storms to sail
I have on board;
Above the raging of the gale
I hear my Lord.

He holds me when the billows smite;
I shall not fall:
If sharp, 'tis short; if long, 'tis light;
He tempers all.

Safe to the land—safe to the land—
The end is this;
And then with him go hand in hand
Far into bliss.

SECRET SOCIETIES.

BY J. W. DEER.

As Christ said to his disciples "swear not at all," no Christian should swear or be a member of any society that binds its membership with an oath. But there may be societies, and even secret societies, that are not oath-bound, and it is of such that I wish to treat more particularly. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between good and evil, and they are frequently so blended, or mixed, that it is hard to separate the chaff and tares from the wheat. I believe it is scriptural not to ruin the wheat in an effort to destroy the tares; and, therefore, I feel that we should be very careful in speaking of secret societies, so that we do not call evil good and good evil. Let us first inquire into the

MORAL CHARACTER OF SECRECY.

Is secrecy a thing of fixed moral character? and, if so what is it? Is secrecy, *per se*, always wrong, so that we may say of a thing it is wrong because it is secret? If so we may say of all secret societies that they are sinful; but if secrecy is not wrong in itself, then we must look for other criteria by which to determine the moral character of secret societies. Christ never commanded his disciples to do anything that is inherently wrong; but he did command them to pray and to give alms in secret; and, therefore, secrecy, sometimes, is not wrong, but right and good.

There is a presumption against secrecy, because bad men,—adulterers, liars, thieves and murderers,—seek seclusion. But in such cases it is not secrecy, *per se*, but the things kept secret that are wrong. Secrecy, however, becomes an accomplice, by covering up the evil and shielding the evil-doer from disgrace and justice. Secrecy, therefore, is sometimes right and sometimes wrong; and its moral character is determined by attending circumstances. We must not say that a thing is wrong because it is secret, but must examine things and their attendant circumstances before we can decide whether secrecy with reference to them is wrong or allowable and right. Not every good should be done in secret, for Jesus said, "Let your light so shine"; neither should every evil be published abroad for he taught, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault, between thee and him alone." It may be wrong to conceal a good, and it may be right to conceal an evil, and we know that we can do good in secret as well as do evil; and, therefore, secrecy is dependent upon its attending circumstances for its moral character. If the preponderance of circumstances is in favor of secrecy, it is right, and *vice versa*. Now let us drop secrecy for a moment and look at the

MORAL CHARACTER OF SOCIETIES.

By a society is to be understood an association of a number of persons for the accomplishment of some purpose. Societies are generally governed by a constitution and by-laws or by a code of rules, written or unwritten, amounting to the same. This is necessary to secure harmonious action, concentrated power and success. The church of Christ is a society; and the Bible contains its constitution and by-laws. This is the crowning idea and fact of a society. But it does not follow that there can be no bad societies because God has organized a good society. I am told of the organization of a society, and I say "that is all right"; but I am told that it is a society to hinder the progress of the gospel and to disseminate infidelity, and I say "that is all wrong." My first judgment was rash and premature. The moral character of a society or association of men is also to be determined by attending circumstances—by its object

and by its ways and means employed for its accomplishment. If these are all good, it is a good society; but if the object of the society is not good, or if it should be good and some of the means employed should be immoral, the moral tone of the society is changed. This is true of open associations, and it is equally true of

SECRET SOCIETIES.

From what has already been noticed it is clear that a society is not necessarily bad or immoral, because it is a secret society, nor is it necessarily good because it is open. We must judge of the moral status of both by the same criteria, with this difference against secret societies, that it is more difficult to form a correct judgment of them. We must form our judgment according to our information. If we are ignorant of the object of a society; or, knowing its object, if we are ignorant of its obligations, its ceremonies, and its methods of work, whether written or unwritten, we lack in proper data to form a correct conclusion or judgment. To my mind it is doubtful whether a Christian can consistently become a member of such society. He can engage in secret prayer and almsgiving, but he knows all about the nature of these before he engages in them; and this, it seems to me, is all the kind of secrecy that is allowable to him. Where the nature of the ceremonies and work is not understood, the elements of faith are wanting; and the Christian walks by faith. He is a child of light and walks in the light. Paul says: "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith." If this is true of eating, is it not also true of any other act or work? Is it not just therefore, to conclude that a Christian should not become a member of any society of which he cannot form a correct judgment until he is initiated? God has organized a society for the accomplishment of all good; but while all are invited to become members of this society, no one is invited to come in ignorance and unbelief. He is to hear, understand, believe, and "walk in the light as he is in the light." "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."

A Christian should not be identified with any society which rejects Christ from its creed. By the creed of a society is meant the profession or confession of faith that is demanded of those who apply for membership before they are initiated. "A BELIEF IN GOD. This constitutes the sole creed of a Mason, at least the only creed he is required to profess."—*Mackey's Ritual*, p. 45. This is considered necessary; "for the atheist would have no motive to keep a promise or to preserve an obligation."—*Ibid*. In Odd Fellowship, the candidate for the Initiatory Degree is asked, "Do you believe in the existence of a Supreme, Intelligent Being, the Creator and preserver of the Universe."—*Revised Odd Fellowship Illustrated*, p. 48. Lady candidates for the Rebekah degree are not asked whether they believe in such a Being. Probably it is assumed that ladies all believe. The same is true of Adoptive Masonry; although in it ladies take their obligation "in the presence of Almighty God." The Grange acknowledges God, "a Supreme Being," "the heavenly Father." The United Sons of Industry require the candidate "to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, the Creator and preserver of the universe." The creed of the Templars of Honor and Temperance declares, "He alone is our brother whose heart holds this threefold and universal principle: Love to his God, his country, and his fellow-man." "His God" must be "an Almighty God;" but there is nothing in this creed to prevent this God from being as corrupt as Satan. None of these creeds acknowledge Jesus Christ nor the Holy Spirit. A member may be in full standing, and competent to be a chaplain, or priest, in any of these societies, while he may abhor Christianity. He may laugh at the love of Christ, mock at "the communion of the Holy Ghost," and yet he may read or repeat their ritualistic prayers, or offer his own prayer to his own Supreme Being. Mohammedan, Jew, Christian, Pagan, and Deist all mingle together in the greetings and ceremonies of beloved brotherhood.

Other points might be mentioned; but these are sufficient to guide us safely through the bewildering maze of Secret Societies. Avoid oath bound societies; societies of which you cannot form a correct judgment before you are initiated, and societies that would make you a brother to a pagan or deist. These things are evil; and he who is to "abstain from all appearance of evil," should abstain from them. No matter how good the professed object of a society may be, to the question, "Shall we do evil that good may come?" Paul says, "God forbid."

Lathrop, Cal, Sept. 2, 1884.

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PLANTS AND FLOWERS.

BY J. G. SPRICKER.

In all the vast domain of the vegetable kingdom there is scarcely a plant, a shrub or vine that is not of some use. No matter how unsightly it is or how worthless it may seem there is something good about it.

Take for instance the homely rag weed which seems to mar the beauty of the roadside. Its uses are various. Have you never seen the lowing herd which has been feasting in fields of clover, or in pastures of the very best of cultivated grasses, when turned upon the public road, take a few mouthfuls each of this obnoxious weed? Some animals are said to have natural powers of selecting remedies when sick, or an *instinct* for them, and it may be for this reason that cattle manifest an occasional desire for this weed. The rag weed is useful in still other ways. In Autumn pull off a small portion and examine it closely. In tiny pockets you will find small shining objects—seeds. Are they of any use? Stay a moment and watch. Do you see those small birds? These seeds, with the seeds of other weeds, form the food of thousands of the warblers we all love so well. This plant furnishes the physician with a valuable medicine, (not used as much as some others, but useful nevertheless), and the plant has also been used in making paper. Thus it is with nearly all plants. We obtain some of our most valuable remedies from plants otherwise apparently worthless. The most homely flowers supply honey for man and food for the young bee. We all acknowledge the usefulness of those plants which furnish us with food. But is the Geranium, with its lovely umbels, of no importance because it does not minister to our bodily wants? O how we love the flowers. They may be likened unto the love and sympathy of some dear friend who comes to us in our sorrows with words of comfort and pity, their very presence bringing consolation and peace. And this human sympathy in turn is the result of the love of the beautiful "Rose of Sharon" which has been blooming so long and whose beauty can never fade.

Plants in general may be likened unto human life. Weeds represent our afflictions, and trials and persecution, flowers, deeds of kindness and the grasses, grains and fruits represent time and money spent in the furtherance of the gospel. Without weeds the farmer might be tempted to cultivate his crop less thereby depriving it of a great need. So the Christian should be continually blessed with every need and have nothing at all to cross him might lose his desire to attain to some better state than is afforded by this life. Flowers are not all beautiful, neither are all kind acts done in such a way that they can be appreciated. Some fruits are so sour that we either do not use them or else we first supply the saccharine properties which nature has withheld. Even so the offerings which we bring to Christ would be much more acceptable were we to sweeten them with true love that we might be able to say that it is "for Christ's sake" that we do it. A deed done for a selfish purpose is not acceptable to God although it may be the means of accomplishing much good. The haughty sunflower which raises its head above its neighbors and proclaims aloud, "See what I am doing," is no more thought of than the humble Lily of the Valley. "God loves a cheerful giver," and our welfare depends more upon how we give than upon what we give, as long as we give according to our ability.

Hudson, Iowa, September 5th.

Diffusive Preaching.

The weakness of the pulpit in the present day is largely to be attributed to diffusive preaching. It covers more than is included in the word. It shows a want of appreciation of the work and earnestness in it. No man is diffusive who realizes the magnitude and responsibility of his mission. There is no diffusiveness in earnestness. Dives was not diffusive. Abraham was not diffusive in his replies. They understood each other, and felt the weight of each other's communications.

There is much preaching that sprawls all about at the close. The sun-glass is needed here for concentration and heat. Another kind of preaching is all introduction, while the close, as we heard a farmer describe it, "is the switch end of the tree." It not only fails in force and fervor, but not enough falls in any one spot to do any good. It suggests to us a modern contrivance to water lawns by spray—it dampens everything but soaks nothing, and the gardener has to go about with his water-pot and pour water down at the roots, and open the soil as well, or his choice growths will wither under the spray, even when continued for hours.—*Presbyterian*.

FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD.

BY A. L. GARDNER.

"Feed the flock of God which is among you" is the solemn direction that St. Peter gave to those who were called elders; and they were to take the oversight of those flocks not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre's sake. These men were not to expect any reward in the way of money compensation for their service, but a crown of glory would be given to them when the chief shepherd should appear.

In the strange follies and religious philosophies, episcopal tyranny and conceited ignorance that fills the world, there is no place granted to new ideas about old questions; yet we venture a new one on the point made prominent in the extract of scripture above.

Those elders were not preachers, nor teachers; they were ordained to look after the welfare of the flock around them, and were men who had borne the heat and burden of the day; experience had taught them regarding the practical things of life what experience alone can teach, and they were competent to feed the flock. Now, when a man is directed to feed something, he does not feed himself; he feeds that which is available, that which has been provided for the purpose.

There are a number of us, young men, who are not competent to feed the flock. We have not had the experience in life that that great and most responsible work demands; but we are food, we are waiting, willing, anxious to be fed to the flock: to be used as food by such elders in giving strength and power to the church of Christ, in preaching the word.

The exhortation of the Apostle, given above, was intended for the elder who watched over, ruled, or did the pastoral work for the flock of God. The preaching of the Gospel was entirely another matter, as those who went forth to preach the Gospel were out of necessity to "live of the Gospel"; and as a writer well says, the burden of caring for the church is not in scripture laid upon the men whom God has sent into the world to preach the Gospel.

It is time that we are learning that the Scriptures recognize gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, and that some are competent to preach, others to minister, others to exhort, others to rule, others to give alms. As we are now constituted, it is expected that the man who is called the pastor, will rule, do the preaching, the teaching, the exhorting, the ministering, look after the singing, feed the flock, take care that none fall short of heaven, and see that sinners are converted. Let us divide up, and give to every man his own work, and the church of Christ will prosper more and the name of God be glorified.

Bellville, Ohio.

Church Dedication.

The new Primitive Brethren church built by Elder D. C. Ullery about 4 miles south of city, was dedicated Sunday forenoon with appropriate services. Rev. J. W. Fitzgerald and Rev. Cripe officiated. There was an immense crowd of people present, not one-half being able to get into the church. The services were very interesting and at the close a collection was taken to raise funds for furnishing the church. The building was very plain like all the church edifices of this denomination, though substantial and spacious. The work was done by D. West & Son, the well known contractors and builders of this city.—*South Bend Tribune*.

Endeavor to be always patient of the faults and perfections of others; for thou hast many faults and imperfections of thy own, that require a reciprocation of forbearance. If thou art not able to make *thyself* that which thou wishest to be, how canst thou expect to mould another in conformity to thy will? But we require perfection in the rest of mankind, and take no care to rectify the disorders of our own heart; we desire that the faults of others should be severely punished, and refuse the gentlest correction ourselves; we are offended at their licentiousness, and yet cannot bear the least opposition to our own immoderate desires; we would subject all to the control of vigorous statutes and penal laws, but will not suffer any restraint upon our own actions. Thus it appears, how very seldom the second of the two great commandments of Christ is fulfilled, and how difficult it is for a man to "love his neighbor as he loves himself."—*T. A. Kempis*.

O powerful Goodness! bountiful Father! merciful Guide! Increase in me that wisdom which discovers my truest interest. Strengthen my resolution to perform what that wisdom dictates. Accept my kind offices to thy other children as the only return in power for thy continual favors to me.—*B. Franklin*.